System Configuration Team (SCT)

Reasonable & Prudent Measure #26
Meeting Notes
January 20, 2000

Greetings and Introductions.

The January 20 meeting of the System Configuration Team was held at the National Marine Fisheries Service offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting was chaired by Bill Hevlin of NMFS and was facilitated by Catheryn Collis. The agenda and a list of attendees for the January 20 meeting are attached as Enclosures A and B.

The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items. Please note that some enclosures referenced may be too lengthy to routinely include with the meeting notes; copies of all enclosures referred to in the minutes are available upon request from Kathy Ceballos of NMFS at 503/230-5420.

Hevlin distributed a handout showing the web page address for the Chief Joseph gas abatement study (http://www.nws.usace.army.mil/hh/gas/). This is the place to look for updates on the Chief Joseph flow deflectors, Hevlin said. He also announced a meeting at which the new SYSTDG spreadsheet numerical model will be demonstrated; the meeting is scheduled for 8:30-noon on February 1 at the NMS offices in Portland.

I. FFDRWG Update: Schedule for Evaluation of John Day Trashrack Occlusion for Surface Bypass Evaluation.

As you will recall, said Hevlin, at our last meeting, we agreed that FFDRWG would make a decision about whether or not the trashrack occlusion could be installed for study this year; this is a report back on what was decided. Norm Tolonen of COE said there have been some problems with the "J"-shape design for the trashrack occlusion project at The Dalles; the upshot is that the Corps doesn't believe it will be possible to get the contracts in place in time for the "J"-shaped occlusion to be constructed, installed and tested this spring. The current plan is to test the occlusion in 2001. Tolonen said he is encouraged by the fact that trials have shown that the "J"-shaped design is guiding fish more efficiently than the standard "L"-shaped occlusion, but some design changes are needed to allow project personnel to install and remove the blocks in a one-day time-frame.

Tolonen added that the existing blocks are at the project, and could be re-installed during the migration if the SCT feels that doing so would have a survival benefit in 2000. After a brief discussion, the SCT recommended that the Corps install the existing blocks for the 2000 migration season.

One additional item regarding The Dalles, said Tolonen – the report on the adult fish ladder dewatering improvements study is now essentially completed, and the plan would be to block the entrances to the collection channel with concrete plugs so that the structure can be dewatered for inspection, maintenance and repair. We will now be moving into plans and specs on that work, Tolonen said; the cost estimate has increased significantly, from about $6 million to $11 million, total, for design and construction. Once the report is finalized, it will be sent out to the region, he added. In response to a question from Hevlin, Tolonen said that, while the Corps is moving out on plans and specs, the final construction decision has not yet been made.

II. Update on SRWG and FFDRWG Progress on Remaining Issues with Proposed FY'00 Studies.

Hevlin distributed Enclosure C, a letter from the Fish Passage Advisory Committee, identifying those proposals where there is still some level of opposition within the salmon managers; it notes that the following studies do not have the full support of one or more of the salmon managers:

- Evaluation of energy expenditure in adult salmon and steelhead migrating upstream in the Columbia and Snake Rivers: understanding the influence of delay, fallback, water temperature and dam operations on fish performance (study codes ADS-00-1, ADS-00-2, ADS-00-5 and SPE-W-00-4)
- Evaluation of migrational delays on the reproductive success of adult hatchery spring chinook salmon in the Columbia and Snake Rivers (study code ADS-00-2)
- Relative survival of juvenile salmon passing through the spillway and ice and trash sluiceway of The Dalles Dam (study code SPE-P-00-8)

- Estimate the survival of migrant juvenile salmonids in the Columbia River from John Day Dam through Bonneville Dam using radio-telemetry (study codes SPE-P-00-7, SPE-P-00-8, BPS-P-00-12)

Hevlin noted that he has not received a formal request from SRWG or FFDRWG requesting the SCT's help in resolving the issues surrounding these studies. However, we did receive this letter from FPAC, requesting that these studies be discussed by the SCT, said Hevlin – hence this agenda item. There may be other studies that will require further discussion by the SCT beyond those mentioned in this letter, Hevlin said; the sooner we can have those discussions, the better.

Tom Lorz noted that neither Idaho nor CRITFC are in support of the reduction in spill at Lower Granite for the SBC test; both Idaho and CRITFC support maintaining the BiOp spill volumes at that project in 2000. We'll discuss that under Agenda Item 4 later in today's meeting, Hevlin said.

Rock Peters said the Corps has had internal discussions about each of the projects in question; he said a full-day meeting was held to discuss the six Bonneville 1 PSC studies and how they will be integrated; what we heard, at the end of the day, was support for that program to move forward. Therefore, said Peters, all of the elements we identified under Bonneville 1 PSC are moving ahead. There are still some operational issues that could impact this study, however, Ron Boyce observed.

The second element that was discussed at the last SCT meeting was questions about two of the adult studies, Peters said – the reproductive success study, and the test of the performance of the EMG tag. We polled all of the relevant agencies and, at the last SCT meeting, reported that we had general agreement from the region to move forward, said Peters. Since then, we received a clarification from FPAC about who stands where on those studies; we then developed a handout showing how we intend to resolve FPAC's concerns, and proceed with these studies in 2000 (Enclosure D), Peters said. Steve Pettit has also provided individual comments to the Corps on these studies, said Peters; we will be addressing those in a letter back to Steve.

The current status of these studies is that the Corps has already provided some funding to the USGS and NMFS to get the studies underway, Peters said – it's either that or lose them for this year. This was done prior to our receipt of the FPAC letter. The Corps would still like to move forward with these studies in 2000, said Peters.

The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to these two studies, with both Pettit and Boyce laying out the reasons they either do not support them or have serious reservations, and Peters explaining why the Corps feel the studies should proceed in 2000. Ultimately, Hevlin said that, as SCT chairman, despite NMFS' support for these projects, he has some reservations about allowing these

studies to proceed in 2000, in the face of significant opposition from some of the salmon managers; he suggested that the Corps meet directly with Oregon and Idaho, outside the SCT meeting, to see if their concerns can be assuaged through further education about the methodology and expected study benefits. It was agreed that Hevlin, Pettit and Boyce will coordinate a meeting between the Corps, the researchers, Oregon and Idaho, to try to reach a greater comfort level about both the study methodology and the expected results in 2000. If that's not possible, said Boyce, we can raise this issue to the IT. Given the fact that this study is going to involve hatcheries and spawning success away from the mainstem, I would also like to get our hatchery staff and field biologists involved in this meeting, said Pettit.

It would be my preference that this topic not be brought back to SCT, Hevlin added – I would prefer that the parties at this meeting either work out their differences for 2000, or develop an approach that will satisfy everyone's needs for 2001. To me, he said, it doesn't make much sense to raise this to the IT, given the fact that they know even less about this issue than we do. It sounds to me as though what Bill is saying is that, if you can't resolve these issues, that the studies not go forward in 2000, and that, rather than raising this issue to the IT, you focus your energies on developing a study design that works for everyone in 2001, Collis said. I'm not going to fall on my sword over this issue, said Peters. John Kranda, however, said he will need to check with others in Portland District before he can say for certain whether or not this issue should be elevated to the IT, if these issues cannot be resolved for 2000.

Moving on to the other two studies that have raised questions among the salmon managers, Peters said the Corps has discussed the status of Bonneville, The Dalles and John Day, as requested at the last SCT meeting. What I heard from FFDRWG and the SRWG was that the Bonneville FPE studies should move forward in 2000, he said. The second element was the radio-tag juvenile survival evaluation at Bonneville, Peters said; what I heard was that that study should focus primarily on the outfall and, as a secondary focus, the spillway. At The Dalles, we have a head-to-head study using both radio and PIT tags; we heard general agreement that both of those studies should move forward, with the stipulation that there should also be a powerhouse release category.

We also discussed the operational impacts of these studies at The Dalles, Peters continued; we have not yet come to agreement on the appropriate spill level during the test – 30 percent, 40 percent, 42.5 percent or 60 percent. Our intent is to work with other entities in the region to develop a workable study plan from an operational standpoint, Peters said. My understanding is that, at yesterday's meeting, FPAC developed their own proposal, he said; NMFS and the Corps will make their recommendation as to what they would like to see, but ultimately, this issue may need to be resolved at a non-technical level. Hevlin noted that Chuck Coutant has told him that the ISAB will be weighing in on this issue in the first part of February.

Marv Yoshinaka said FPAC did discuss the survival study at The Dalles at yesterday's meeting; there was a difference of opinion as to what level of spill should be tested. Several of the agencies would like to see 60-64 percent spill this year, while NMFS' proposal was 40 percent. That's basically where we are right now, Yoshinaka said.

The other study in question was the John Day survival study, Peters said; you will recall that the USGS submitted this study as part of a package that included John Day, The Dalles and Bonneville. With respect to the John Day element, there will need to be some additional operational discussions. In their letter, FPAC recommended that the Corps stop all work at John Day, said Peters; if we do that, there will be no study in 2000. The Corps would prefer to continue to discuss the study approach with the region, Peters said. The Corps would like to propose some operational scenarios for 2000, based on the best available technical information, and ask anyone with concerns about those scenarios to discuss them directly with our division office, he said. What the system can and can't do is really out of our arena, he said – our only concern is what constitutes a technically-sound study.

III. Corps Proposal for FY'01 AFEP Studies Development and Review Process.

Hevlin reminded the other participants that, at the last SCT meeting, there was a discussion about potential ways to refine or improve the AFEP process for FY'01, perhaps by developing a list of needs, objectives and priorities before the researchers are asked to submit proposals. Rock Peters was asked to take a look at the existing process, then come to this meeting with some suggestions about how it might be improved for 2001, Hevlin said.

Peters distributed Enclosure E, a schedule showing the major milestones in the current studies development and review process. He spent a few minutes describing how the process works currently, then said that, based on what he heard at the last SCT meeting, despite the fact that the process isn't perfect, the Corps doesn't see a need to make major changes at this time.

Boyce said he would prefer to have more up-front discussion of new proposals before funding is awarded, to ensure that the research is supported by the region and meets a specific management need or objective, to help avoid problems like those discussed during the previous agenda item. In summary, he said, I think the process you've outlined has all the right elements, except that it doesn't put enough of the focus up front on establishing the research needs and priorities.

Perhaps what we need is another group or subcommittee, other than the SRWG, that tracks all of the research projects, starts meeting several months in advance of the study solicitation and engages in sincere discussion of what each management agency's priority is for that research, Boyce suggested.

The SRWG would then take that subgroup's outputs – at least the high and medium priorities – and conduct detailed reviews of experimental design etc. You're currently trying to do both of those things within the SRWG, said Boyce, and personally, I think it may be more effective to separate them. So this committee would first determine whether the objectives of a given proposal meet the management needs identified, and whether the research is consistent with the needs identified in the BiOp and the ISAB recommendations? Rod Woodin asked. That's correct, Boyce replied. Woodin observed that, under the current process, the research review subcommittees are dominated by the researchers themselves; he said that, in his opinion, it would be more appropriate for the program managers to hold these discussions, without the researchers present. So you would develop this management list of research needs and priorities, and then it would go to SRWG, to develop the one-pagers? Hevlin asked. That's correct, Boyce replied.

Does anyone object to inserting that sort of a management objective-setting process first, before the process is turned over to the researchers? Collis asked. No SCT objections were raised to this suggestion; it was further agreed that Boyce will develop a memo outlining his proposed process change, and that the SCT will discuss it at its next meeting.

IV. Lower Granite Surface Bypass Progress.

A. Overview of Operations Plan for the 2000 Evaluation. Mike Mason distributed Enclosure F, spreadsheets showing the Corps' proposed powerhouse and spill operations for the 2000 Lower Granite SBC test. Mason noted that this topic will be addressed in detail at next week's FFDRWG meeting, and invited anyone with an interest in this topic to attend.

Tim Wick spent a few minutes going through this information (please refer to Enclosure F for details). The bottom line is that, while this proposed operation represents something of a departure from the spill volumes laid out in the BiOp, it is only a starting-point, representing what I think would be best for the test, he said. Wick added that 2000 will be the last year of SBC testing and operation at Lower Granite.

This is a 24-hour test condition? Steve Rainey asked. That's correct, Wick replied. Hevlin said NMFS has some concerns about changing the BiOp spill program at Lower Granite to accommodate this research. Does this represent an overall reduction in spill, or does it just spread the nighttime spill levels over 24 hours? he asked. This proposed operation would take out spill at the lower flow levels, Wick replied; in terms of fish passage benefits, based on 1999 results, if you take just the SBC operation with the training spill, you will pass approximately as many fish over the spillway as you will with a 12-hour spill-to-the-gas-cap operation. Can you produce a summary of those numbers, and your assumptions, for next week's FFDRWG meeting? Hevlin asked. Yes, Wick replied.

Lorz said that, while the tribes understand the Corps' need to deviate from the BiOp spill program in order to obtain a better test, this is a pretty extreme deviation, which may impact other tests as well. I haven't really thought about potential impacts to other tests, Wick replied – that's something that will be discussed at next week's FFDRWG meeting as well.

Pettit said Idaho is concerned about the fact that, over the past three to four years, we haven't even come close to achieving what Idaho considers to be spreading the risk. We're looking for ways to increase the number of fish going over the spillway, to achieve a true 50-50 split between in-river and transported fish. This special operation doesn't look as though it will do much to achieve that goal, Pettit said; we will also be voicing our standard objection to deviation from the BiOp spill program.

B. Design of Spillway Crest Weir and Operations for the 2001 Evaluation. Mason distributed Enclosure G, a handout including diagrams of the spillway crest weir designs at Lower Granite and diagrams of the targeted raised spillway crest benefits for each design. He explained that the Corps started with four design concepts, now narrowed down to two; the two design finalists will be subjected to general forebay modeling at WES during the week of February 7. During the week of March 6, the Corps is planning a demonstration of the sectional modeling of the two designs at Redmond; we will also have some video of the WES modeling sessions, Mason said. The intent, at that point, will be to pick the preferred option, then move out on detailed plans and specs, Mason explained. Our intent is to award the construction contract in September, he added; again, we will discuss this subject in more detail at next week's FFDRWG meeting.

Rainey spent a few minutes going through Enclosure G, and the technical differences between the two designs. In response to a question, Mason said the total cost of design, construction, installation and M&E is expected to be on the order of $8.5 million.

I put this item on the agenda because I heard some concerns about the idea that we might have to cut off spill during the 2001 test period, said Hevlin. What I hear, however, is that it will not be necessary to curtail spill in order to test this device. I think that will need to be discussed further, said Rainey – there are some who believe that this device would allow us to curtail spill while passing the same number of fish, while others would prefer to continue 24-hour spill during the test in order to increase the number of fish that stay in-river. That's part of what we need to discuss at FFDRWG, Rainey said.

V. FFDRWG Update.

No further FFDRWG update was presented at today's meeting.

VI. Next SCT Meeting and Agenda Items.

The next meeting of the System Configuration Team was set for Thursday, February 17, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at NMFS' Portland offices. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.